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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 000438

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN'S SHIA OPPOSITION: MANAGING SECTARIAN
PRESSURES AND FOCUSING ON 2010 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. 08 MANAMA 313 B. 08 MANAMA 536 C. 08 MANAMA 592 D. 08 MANAMA 593 E. 08 MANAMA 762 F. MANAMA 50 G. MANAMA 57 H. MANAMA 190 I. MANAMA 220

1.(SBU) Summary: Despite stiff criticism from Sunni political opponents and many in the Shia community, Bahrain's Shia opposition party, Wifaq,

2.(C) Wifaq remains committed to participating in parliament, and has repeatedly stated that it will run candidates in 2010 (Note: Wifaq led th

3.(C) Hamed Khalaf leads the internal committee charged with determining the makeup of Wifaq's parliamentary list for 2010 (ref J). He told pol

4.(C) Some of the current parliamentarians have grown tired of their roles. Several have complained to us that their constituents call them day

5.(SBU) Wifaq's Shia constituency demands that the government address perceived discrimination directly and provide free housing, jobs (especie

6.(SBU) Wifaq leaders regularly condemn violence, whether on MANAMA 00000438 002 OF 003 the part of security forces or protesters, and insist t

7.(SBU) Recognizing the power of the street, Wifaq tries to mollify Shia demands and passions while demonstrating to the government its mass su

8.(C) Wifaq's work to keep the street peaceful has cost it some political capital. Graffiti in several Shia villages ridiculed Wifaq parliament

9.(SBU) Wifaq, the only opposition party in parliament, alleges that the government gerrymandered constituency boundaries in the 2006 elections

10.(SBU) Wifaq faces an uphill battle within the parliament where smaller Sunni blocs and a smattering of pro-government independents cooperate

11.(SBU) Wifaq struck back in March when a parliamentary committee it controls voted to lift independent Salafi rabble rouser Jassim Saeedi's i

12.(SBU) Wifaq has proven that, despite such sectarian bickering, it can work with the other blocs to achieve its aims - provided there is a sh

13.(SBU) Many of Wifaq's critics, particularly Sunnis, use the Shia practice of looking to "marjaia" (religious referents) for guidance on poli

14.(C) Wifaq's opposition to a Family Law gives these critics ammunition. Under instructions from Bahrain's leading Shia cleric, Ayatollah Isa

15.(U) Other Sunni critics point to the display of Hizbollah flags and portraits of Khomeini in Shia villages as evidence of divided loyalties

16.(C) Despite often withering criticism from the radical Shia flank and from Sunni political blocs, Wifaq has stood its ground. It has advocat